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Letter to the Editor: National Crime Victims' Rights Week is April 22-28, 2007

April 22-28 marks National Crime Victims' Rights Week. It is a period for all Americans to learn more about the realities of crime victimization, reflect on the cost of crime to our society, and promote laws, policies, and programs to help victims of crime rebuild their lives. The Massachusetts Department of Correction, together with communities and groups across the nation, will participate in events to honor victims of crime and the people who assist them.

This year's theme is "Serving Every Victim, Every Time." I am committed to ensuring that all available services are offered by the Department of Correction to victims of crime, including detailed information on their rights, comprehensive notification services, referral services and emotional support. I am pleased to report that today, the victim community is treated with respect and compassion, but it wasn't always this way. Victims' rights have evolved and been strengthened over the years as activists in the Commonwealth and throughout the country made us aware that we could and should do more for crime victims. In 1984, The Victim Bill of Rights was enacted. The Department of Correction recognized it was in a unique position to reach out to victims of crime and now it is common course to notify certified victims when inmates are transferred to lower security, when inmates are released from incarceration, and when other circumstances call for the victim to be informed. Victims are also assisted in a myriad of other ways. We have added electronic mailings to aid in our notification responsibilities. We have created a Victim Service Council, bringing together victims, advocates in the public and private sector and government agencies, with a core mission of improving services.

Violent crime can strike any one of us. No one is immune. And while it is a communal issue, victim responses are as unique as the victims themselves. That is why it takes all of us to aid those who have been victimized.

Remember the victims during National Crime Victims' Rights Week and throughout the year. If someone you know has been a victim of crime, help them receive needed services.

Kathleen M. Dennehy
Commissioner
Massachusetts Department of Correction